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## **NEWS**

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**STATEMENT OF**  
**THE HONORABLE**  
**HERBERT H. BATEMAN**  
**CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY READINESS**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

*March 11, 1998*

This hearing is part of our ongoing effort to get a handle on the true status of the readiness of our military forces. The Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff's guide to the Chairman's Readiness System states that "Readiness is a fundamental characteristic of an effective armed force." Today we are focused on a part of the readiness equation that leaves little doubt as to its importance in determining the true status of our armed forces.

This hearing is focused on the mission capable rates of aircraft and other major combat systems within our military. We need not point out that mission capability rates are a vital readiness indicator of a combat unit. I must tell you that the current mission capability rates and trends that are being reported are truly troubling to me.

For a military unit that has one or more of these systems, the equipment's operational rates are critical to the overall performance of the unit in performing its assigned combat role. We continue to read reports such as found in the January 6, 1998, *Defense Daily*. The report pointed out that a "lack

of critical parts for the F-16 aircraft has forced two fighter squadrons to cannibalize grounded aircraft to ensure they can continue to conduct Operation Deliberate Guard, the NATO peace enforcement mission over Bosnia.” It causes me to wonder that if such a high priority mission is lacking critical parts, what is the current state of the rest of the force?

Today we will hear from witnesses that will attempt to explain why we continue to see the drop in mission capability rates of aircraft, such as the F-16, and other major combat systems within the military. Of particular concern to this committee is the continuing decline of Air Force and Navy aircraft mission capable rates. The Air Force has experienced a steady decline since 1991 and there doesn’t seem to be any end in the decline in sight. I have great concerns that the decline in mission capability rates across the board, continues to decline. At the same time we continue to receive reports from the leadership of the Pentagon that the state of readiness is as high as ever and that we are ready to go to war.

I would remind everyone that nearly four years ago, this committee found indications of serious readiness problems within the military. At that time, the committee determined that the services were, in fact, in the early stages of a readiness decline. Although at the time the information was largely dismissed by the Pentagon as anecdotal, the committee pressed the administration to increase their emphasis on Readiness to avoid the problems of the seventies when the military became a “hollow force”.

The Clinton administration has made the claim that Readiness is a top priority in formulating defense budgets, including the fiscal year 1999 budget currently being considered before this committee. However, the budget submitted to Congress continues to be inadequate and readiness problems persist. From reports received during member and staff visits to the field, and from numerous reports in the press, there are strong indications that there are still serious Readiness problems in the military.

The Air Force has reported to the subcommittee that the long term mission capable rate trends have steadily declined since 1991. In the aggregate for all aircraft, the overall mission capable rate has declined nine percent to its current level of 74 percent. Since 1991, the Air Force’s fighter aircraft mission capable rates have declined by 10 percent to its current low of 74 percent; the Bomber fleet has declined 2.3 percent to a current low of 64 percent; and the strategic airlift has declined 6.2 percent to a current 70 percent. It must be noted that it is only with extraordinary maintenance efforts that these rates have been attained and these are not fully mission capable rates.

To overcome the operational challenges caused by the smaller number of flyable aircraft, maintenance personnel are working harder and longer hours. The longer hours are often spent on the increased use of a cannibalization process of taking parts from a non flyable aircraft and using them to fix another aircraft. Cannibalization of non flyable aircraft often create more problems because of the number of items broken in the process of removing perfectly good parts from an aircraft. Also, it increases the amount of work required of an already overworked enlisted maintenance force.

The Navy has reported similar problems with aircraft mission capability rates. From 1994 to 1997, for aircraft aboard Navy carriers, the Pacific fleet has experienced a 12 percent drop in aircraft fully mission capable rates to its recent low of 54 percent. Non-deployed aircraft mission capable rates dropped eight percent to 61.4 percent and aircraft fully mission capable rates for non deployed units dropped 10.6 percent to 48.9 percent during the same period.

These operational rates strike at the very heart of what this committee has been saying about the readiness of the military. The public readiness reports provided by the Pentagon do not reflect the actual readiness of the force. It will serve this committee well to have a clear and complete understanding of the problems the services are facing in getting the necessary parts and performing the maintenance on rapidly aging aircraft and combat equipment. Unfortunately, the implications of continually limited budgets do not bode well for the future readiness of these units.

We are very fortunate to have two panels of individuals who can speak to the operational and the logistics support of major combat systems. The first panel is made up of the chief operations officer in each service. The second panel is made up of the chief logistics officer from each service.